

A melanic Reed Dagger *Simyra albovenosa* (Goeze) ab. *murina* Aurivillius (Lep.: Noctuidae) in Essex

Bretherton, Goater and Lorimer (in Heath & Emmet, 1983. *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, volume 10. Harley Books), state that the melanic ab. *murina* Aurivillius of the Reed Dagger, the most common form in northern Scandinavia, had not been found in Britain. On the morning of 16.vii.2005 I noticed a dark 'dagger' in my trap along with three typical examples of *S. albovenosa*. I passed this specimen to Brian Goodey who kindly carried out a dissection and confirmed it as being a male *S. albovenosa*.

My trap is situated in my semi-wild garden in Maldon, Essex, which backs onto open farmland, with a seawall about half a mile away. Dykes around the fields contain common reed *Phragmites australis*, the nearest being 250 metres away. The reed dagger is a frequent visitor to my trap from mid-July to early August, with 15 examples in 2004 and 25 in 2005. Recently I have noticed variation in the ground colour of the moths, ranging from typical pale forms to those with light greyish brown forewings and the dark example figured. Given the abundance of local populations and this colour range, it seems far more likely that this dark moth is home-bred and not a migrant, and there was little migrant activity noted around the date of capture. I wonder if anyone else noticed a similar variation in other parts of the country?— RUSSELL NEAVE, 219 Mundon Road, Maldon, Essex CM9 6PW.



Plate D. *Simyra albovenosa* (Goeze) ab. *murina* Aurivillius, Maldon, Essex, 15 July 2005, R. Neave